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ABSTRACT

This report describes a British local government's role in the provision of schooling. It identifies the benefits and limitations of that involvement, and draws out the implications for South Africa. The document focuses on the Birmingham City Council, its committees, departments, and services, and their current role in the city's schools. It is based on a case study that drew upon published and unpublished documents, consultations with key people involved with the Birmingham City Council, the Local Education Authority, those who had expertise in the area of local government and/or schooling, observations of meetings among city council members, and six focused interviews with people in positions of responsibility. The report's first section proposes a theoretical framework for investigating the local government in Birmingham and its involvement in schooling. This section considers local government's role within the framework of principles that underpin South Africa's new education policy. The second section contains a brief discussion of Birmingham's local government structure and offers a detailed description of the Education Committee as the governance structure specifically responsible for education decision-making in the city. The third section discusses the role of the City Council and outlines the benefits and limitations of that role. (Contains 65 references. Appendices include data related to Birmingham and its city council.) (RJM)

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BIRMINGHAM

A case study of the role of local government in the provision of schooling

Jenni Karlsson

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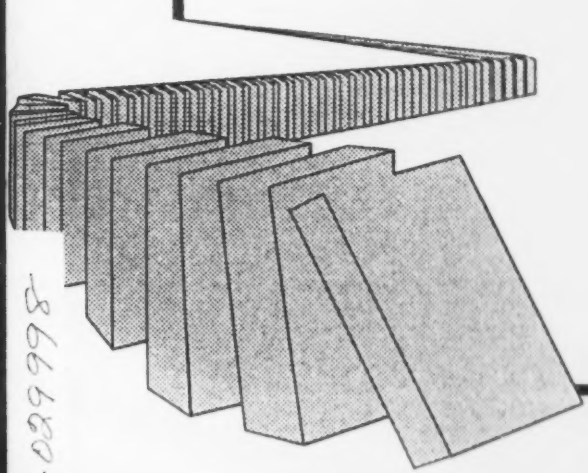

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Birmingham: A case study of the role of local government in the provision of schooling

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INTRODUCTION

1. Background of this case study

During the 1990s, South Africa as a nation began to transform its local government system. This was essential in order to erode the apartheid character of its cities and rural areas through non-racist and non-sexist, democratic governance. A decisive stage in this process was the State President's endorsement of the Local Government Transition Act in 1993 (SPO,1994), which was developed by the multi-party Local Government Negotiating Forum during the demise of de Klerk's white-dominated National Party government and the election of Mandela's democratic Government of National Unity (GNU).

This Act, accepted and passed by the all-white parliament, outlined the three-stage process through which South Africa would disband the old apartheid forms of city and local councils, local authorities and joint services boards (Atkinson, 1995). In the 'pre-interim' phase, negotiating forums were established to enable the former structures to negotiate as equals with the civic associations and extra-parliamentary groups. In the second phase, Transitional Metropolitan Authorities (TMAs) or Transitional Local Councils (TLCs) in rural areas were appointed by the negotiating forums. These bodies began the process of amalgamating administrations, finances and service provisioning. They also had to manage the first democratic elections for local authorities in the metropolitan cities, towns and rural areas.

Essentially, this complex process was one of managing the handing over of power from fragmented racially based authorities to democratically-elected representatives of all the people within a geographic area. By their nature, electoral processes lead unavoidably to 'winners and losers'. Thus, these transitional arrangements, laying the foundation for the future of South Africa's non-racial and democratic cities and local government, have been fraught with bitter boundary disputes and party politicking. At the time of this investigation the whole of KwaZulu-Natal and parts of the Western Cape provinces still only had interim transitional councils because elections had been postponed due to various disputes.

Despite the existence of the Local Government Transitional Act, it was apparent to the Education Policy Unit (University of Natal) in the course of research into the decentralisation of school governance structures,[1] that none of the major political parties and stakeholders in the education sector had a vision of the interface between the newly-accepted conceptualisation of local government structures and schooling. We assumed that the absence of such a systemic relationship in the past accounted for this vacuum.

However, the (Interim) *Constitution of South Africa Act 200 of 1993*, gave provinces responsibility for schooling. In so doing, these constitutional provisions offer, for the

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[1] See page 52 in Karlsson, J., Pampallis, J. and Sithole, S. 1996. *Restructuring educational governance at sub-national levels in South Africa*. Durban: Education Policy Unit.

first time, the potential for democratic local government to play a partnership role in the provision of schooling. Indeed, the existence of similar partnerships in other countries suggested that there was potential in this regard for South Africa. It was also realised that local authorities in South Africa have played and will always play an indirect role in the provision of education through the provision of basic services such as water, electricity, land, the provision of facilities for leisure, sport, recreation and training and in the provision of educational resource institutions such as libraries, museums and zoos.

Thus, it was the potential inherent in the constitutional provision for local authorities, the context of social transformation and transition and a realisation that South African educationists and local authorities lack experience of such direct partnerships, which led the Education Policy Unit to investigate the role of local government in the provision of schooling, commencing with a case study of the Birmingham City Council. It was anticipated that this research would contribute to current public debates about democratic governance of schooling and assist policy developers and decision-makers to understand the issues and consider the possibilities of involving local government in the provision of schooling.

It is acknowledged that while case studies are limited by problems such as:

- specificity: that knowledge gained from one particular study cannot necessarily be generalised to formulate a theory;

- transference: that insights learnt from one particular example are not necessarily relevant and able to be related and transferred to other unique circumstances;

- distortion: that the factors, events or interactive processes observed in the single, unique situation are not representative of factors, events or processes that occur in other similar situations (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995);

nevertheless, case studies help us to concentrate on a specific situation and closely examine the events and interactive processes which may be overlooked in a large-scale study and thus gain a deeper understanding of the issues. By using a variety of research methods to collect data, the case study provides a more detailed and accurate understanding of the problem under investigation. In the area of public policy, a case study can enable policy developers and analysts to reflect on and understand how others have tackled situations, issues and problems that may have some resonance (even if the circumstances are not alike) with their own context. As an initial phase of a larger research project, as in this instance, a case study is useful to identify the key issues that merit further investigation.

The intentions of this case study were threefold:

- to describe and understand the current role of a British local government in the provision of schooling;

- to identify the benefits and limitations of that involvement;

- to draw out the implications for South Africa.

The focus was on the Birmingham City Council, its committees, departments and services and their current role in the City's schools. Private/independent and 'grant-maintained'[2] schools in Birmingham were excluded except in so far as data from grant-maintained schools could throw light on the research questions. Although it was recognised that the Education Committee was not the only City Council committee playing a role in the city's schooling system, the time constraints of the field trip only permitted investigation of one other agency: the library services of the Leisure and Community Services Committee.

This case study can be described as an interpretative and instrumental study because it was characterised by complexity, depth and a theoretical orientation and was used to gain insight into issues of the research topic (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:321-322).

There are a number of reasons why Birmingham City is relevant to South Africa. It is the largest single local government in Britain and has examples of the full range of schools that can be found across Britain (Gray, pers.comm. 19/1/96). Historically, Birmingham has had a large working class community, located as it is within Britain's most important industrial region. However, the City now has above national-average unemployment rates and poverty and faces a shrinking resource-base. In recent decades many immigrants from Britain's former colonies have settled in Birmingham and this has given the City a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-faith and diverse language character. Birmingham remains a stronghold of the Labour Party, which could arguably be said to have some social values in common with the African National Congress (ANC), the leading partner in South Africa's Government of National Unity (GNU).

To all these challenges the City Council appears to have responded pro-actively and positively rather than by resisting change. South Africa has large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled adults, high levels of unemployment and poverty and a population with many faiths, languages, cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Although there are differences between Birmingham and South African cities in the levels of education and unemployment, the experiences of an urban education system that has tried to cope with these challenges is likely to offer some meaningful insights. As the Birmingham Chief Education Officer has said:

> *...If there is one place where it might be possible to make an urban education system work for everyone rather than a few, it should be Birmingham and it should be now* (Brighouse, 1993).

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[2] If a school has grant-maintained (GM) status, it receives its funding direct from central government's Secretary of State through the Funding Agency for Schools rather than from the local education authority (LEA). The school is therefore no longer maintained financially and organisationally by the LEA or bound by its policies, procedures and practices and the governing body becomes the employer of the school's staff (DFE, 1993:1-2).

As a result of the time constraints of the field trip, the study was limited to the following research methods:

- an overview of selected published and unpublished documents (see pages 47-51);
- consultations with key people who are or have been involved with the Birmingham City Council, Local Education Authority (LEA), or who have expertise in the area of local government and/or schooling (see Appendix 1);
- observations of meetings between city councillors, senior and middle management city council officers and principals (see Appendix 3);
- six focused interviews with people in positions of responsibility, representing particular but different constituent perspectives within local government, local authority schools and schools which have opted-out of the LEA (see Appendix 1).

In this report, when different British and South African terms existed for the same concept, e.g. head teacher and principal, the term more widely used in South Africa was preferred for the sake of the audience.

As a foreign researcher, I experienced difficulty in orienting myself to local education terminology, understanding the complexities of the local government and LEA system in Birmingham, locating data sources, and, on rare occasions, gaining access to interviewees. However, these limitations were moderated by the positive response of the City's key leaders and academics who were all supportive of the aims of this research. They gave generously of their time and documents, indulged my naive questions and allowed me access to all the meetings and events that I wished to attend.

In the first section of this report I propose a theoretical framework for investigating the local government in Birmingham and its involvement in schooling. I also consider local government's role within the framework of principles that underpin South Africa's new education policy (DoE, 1995) and reflect on the National Colloquium on Local/District Governance in Education (CEPD and DoE,1995) which identified some of the themes most relevant to the South African context.

The second section contains a short historical overview of Birmingham and a brief discussion of Birmingham's local government structure which has education as its political priority. This is followed by a detailed description of the Education Committee as the governance structure specifically responsible for education decision making in the City, the Education Department, which executes the decisions of the Education Committee and the schooling system in Birmingham. The third and most important section includes the discussion of the City Council's role, an outline of the benefits and limitations of that role and concludes with a consideration of the possible implications for South Africa.

SECTION ONE

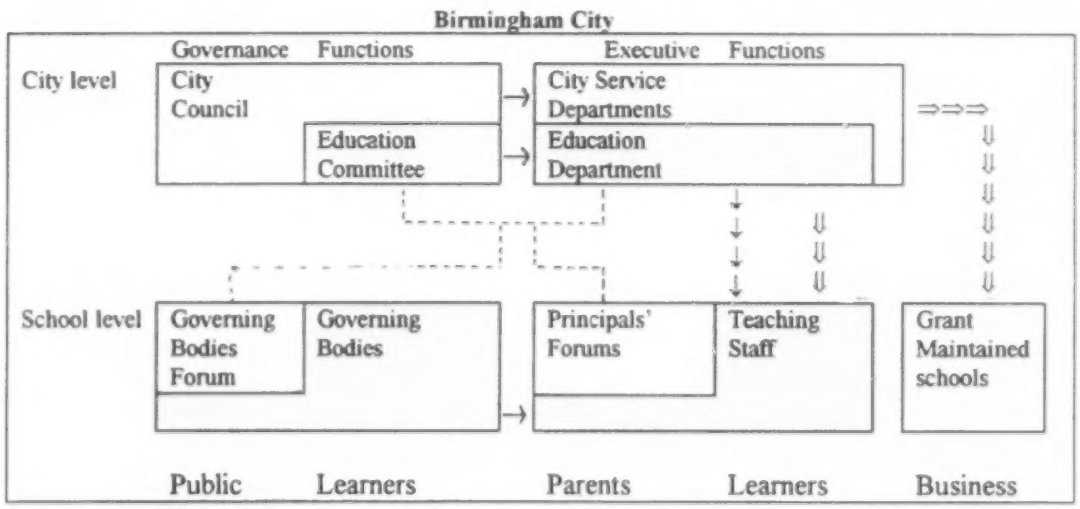
2. Theoretical Framework

From a theoretical perspective, the case study constitutes an exemplar of the practice of policy, as it is articulated in the *1988 Education Reform Act (ERA)* and subsequent legislation. However, the focus is not on policy texts, nor an evaluation of the degree to which they are implemented, even though local government's role in the provision of schooling is largely determined by policy texts and how these are embedded in the schooling system (Bowe et al, 1992:6).

Most people that I met in Birmingham assumed that this investigation was about the LEA. However, local government is a broader structure comprising the City Council and all its executive offices. The notion of the LEA as a sub-system of local government is not explicitly defined in the 1988 legislation although it is a common (and loosely) used term in Britain. This investigation considered local government's role in relation to schooling and thus was not limited to the LEA which is responsible for schools. Indeed, the report includes references to other departments of the City such as Leisure and Community Services, Welfare Services and Health Services.

The graphical presentation below identifies the components of local government and the schooling system. In order to understand the role of local government structures in the schooling system, the study considers the following aspects:

- composition and function of the component;
- interaction;
- nature of the relationship.



→ direction of statutory authority
--- communication
⇒ service provision
□ LEA

Ranson's framework for the theoretical analysis of public policy (such as for education) accommodates an understanding of:

- historical context;
- structure and action (or interaction); and
- the theory and value which inform the practices (1995:442-443).

Following the 1988 ERA, a new era in education policy commenced. In Ranson's critique (1990; 1993; pers.comm. 9/2/96) local government (i.e. the intermediary level in the British three tier governance system comprising national, metropolitan/county and institutional levels) underwent a process of reorganisation and reconceptualisation and various interpretations of its new role began to emerge among LEAs across Britain.

He argued that this process is understood by considering the historical context and the underpinning value-based discourses. To do this, Ranson traced the characteristics of current relationships between local governments and schools to the post-World War II 'political settlement' which led to a social democratic approach (1993:1). He located this within a pluralist framework in which social order is understood as arising from agreement between a complex network of partners (1995:428-432). These developments reflected post-World War II attempts to move away from the former selective and class-driven society to that which would provide all citizens with equal opportunities for advancement.

Thus the *Education Act of 1944*, driven by values of broad social democracy, provided the enabling legislation for a national education framework involving additional education partners such as church schools and delegating the provision and maintenance powers to local governments. Although this was initially only considered as a loose 'partnership' and power over the curriculum was largely devolved to schools, over the next 30-40 years until 1988, local governments assumed greater autonomy. This provided a climate for great variety to emerge, both in the content of teaching and learning and in the management of schools. At local government level this led to bureaucracies of highly skilled and professional people responsible for providing, planning, managing and assuring the quality of teaching and learning. The LEAs developed roles as comprehensive providers of all services to schools under their responsibility.

During the 1960s and 70s, criticism of the performance and quality of the schooling that had developed under the social welfare system (Brighouse, 1996:4) led to the emergence of a different set of values related to the market and individual consumers. This culminated in the passing of the 1988 ERA by Prime Minister Thatcher's Conservative government. In Ranson's analysis, the legitimacy of local government's role as the provider and maintainer of the schooling system, had been eroded by arguments that the public (as individual 'consumers') had been excluded from selecting, governing and managing schools. These values emphasised the individual as a consumer with the right to choose and purchase social services, necessitating the reorganisation of government structures as well as institutional governance, funding

and management mechanisms. Thus, in relation to the focus of this study, the major thrusts of the 1988 Act and subsequent legislation and circulars were:

- institutional governance and management of schools;
- a system by which schools could opt-out of the LEA and financing system by taking 'grant maintained' status with funds provided from central government;
- national curriculum (excluding religious and special education) and inspection as a norm in all schools;

In effect this legislation, premised on the market-driven value system, substantially erased the powers formerly assumed and exercised by local authorities and diverted these in bi-polar directions, i.e. to central government (for curriculum regulation) and to institutions (for school management and governance). While the notion of 'partnership' remained, power shifted to school governors and central government's Minister of Education through the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Despite these systemic changes, schooling in Britain was still characterised by complexity and variance across the country, and policy discourses remained keenly contested by politicians, academics, practitioners and bureaucrats (Ranson, 1995:427).

Level	Governance Structure	Executive Structure
National	Parliament	Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) with Secretary of State
Local	City Council (in particular, Education Committee)	Education Department with Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Institutional	School Governing Body	School Management Team with Head Teacher

Ranson (1993; pers.comm. 9/2/96) has identified several emerging interpretations among British local authorities as they see their role in a post-1988 schooling system:

- provision: continuing the pre-1988 role of comprehensive service providers and managers, despite the shrinking resource-base of local authorities;
- partnership: networking with and enabling schools to provide learners with a cost-effective, efficient and quality education;
- advocacy: developing community-based consultative structures which enhance the capacity of the public to support and challenge the service received in a client-contractor agreement;
- contractual: in a client-contractor relationship with the school;
- visionary: promoting a vision of a 'learning society' i.e. lifelong learning;

- quality assurance: offering schools support in terms of monitoring, evaluation and advice, in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

These emergent roles are partly driven by city leaders who realise that the problems and imperatives of this decade and of 21st Century cities necessitate societies (i.e. individuals and organisations) which are constantly updating their information and skills. This has popularised the term 'learning society'. Given that informed learning societies will inevitably aspire to more participatory forms of democracy, Ranson postulates that an alternative public domain through which a vibrant civil society can more fully engage in policy and decision-making processes will begin to emerge (Ranson, 1992; 1995:443). These ideas about the learning society are a compelling affirmation of South African policy analysts who have, over the years, called for the establishment of democratic governance structures in education and indeed, have assisted the GNU in formulating policy documents that led to significant legislation.

As stated above, this case study of Birmingham was conducted with the intention of contributing to the debate in South Africa about the role of local government in the provision of schooling. Thus the usefulness of a descriptive account of Birmingham's City Council and its relationship to the school system would be marginal without an appreciation of the vision that underpins the role of the City Council.

In addition to identifying and understanding the values that drive the Birmingham City Council in its relations with its schools, it is essential to locate this investigation within the values and purposes currently finding voice among South African education policy developers. Two documents are important in this respect.

Firstly, the discourse surrounding the role of local government in schools must be located within the basic principles that underpin the new paradigm of education in South Africa as articulated in the *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE, 1994):

- democracy and accountability in the schooling system: whether a city council's Education Committee deepens the democratisation of the schooling system and enhances the democracy as we know it in school governing bodies;

- life-long learning: whether local government is the structure to facilitate and promote a shared vision of life-long learning among schools, their governing bodies and other learning institutions in the education system;

- quality: whether the quality of learning and teaching in schools is improved as a result of resources being made available directly or indirectly by local government;

- access: whether the involvement of local government enhances access to learning in schools;

- redress: whether city councils have the capacity to enhance the speedy implementation of redressive measures in the move towards greater equity in schools;

- efficiency: whether local government structures enhance systemic planning and networking for the efficient allocation and use of limited resources.

Secondly, the National Colloquium on Local/District Governance of Education problematised the decentralisation of governance options for South Africa on several themes (CEPD and DoE, 1995: 23-25):

- political and democratic principles and their implementation: civil servants are tasked to translate political decisions into reality and unless the political vision is clearly articulated, implementation is problematic;

- functions: there must be clarity concerning the deconcentrated, delegated or devolved powers and functions;

- human resource capacity building: local level administration will require, in addition to management skills, political acumen, attitudes and vision;

- trade-offs between financial imperatives, efficiency and equity;

- reconstruction priorities and planning: policy developers need to distinguish whether local governance is a short, medium or long term objective;

- multi-function vs single-function: in multi-function structures education will have to compete with other sectors for limited local government resources.

SECTION TWO

3. Birmingham City as the context

Although Birmingham was only declared a city in 1889, its origins can be traced back to 1166 when Peter de Bermingham secured from Henry II the right to hold a market in the village and levy tolls (Whybrow, 1972). His descendants lived in the manor house for 400 years, by which time the market site had become an important centre, attracting craftspeople and forming the hub for a network of main roads leading outwards to various surrounding districts. The supply of fuel from nearby forests and plentiful water led to a growth in metal working, tanning and textile manufacture. Thus, the village gained prominence and flourished. In the mid-1700s it was already a town known for its marketplace; the manufacturing of small metal objects, buckles, guns, leather tanning and cloth making and as a canal and road transport node. The ingenuity and inventiveness of the townsfolk led to Birmingham playing an important role in the industrial revolution.

As the population rose and colonial trade brought new and wider markets, Birmingham's emphasis on manufacturing during the 19th century and a boom in the early 20th century, laid the foundation for many of the problems and challenges presently faced by the city. In 1974, after the incorporation of various smaller districts, boroughs and parishes, the Birmingham District Council was named, with the title being changed to Birmingham City Council in July, 1986.

During years of war and the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire the city was ideally suited for a manufacturing and armaments industry. But in the years following World War II, the disintegration of the British Empire, the emergence of information technologies and global market competitors have led to unemployment, poverty and inner city urban decay in Birmingham. The nature of these problems is further complicated by race, ethnicity and language issues, with the poor and unemployed being predominantly among communities from the former colonies who have now settled in Britain.

During the 1980s the City Council prioritised urban renewal projects (such as the construction of an International Convention Centre) which would provide employment, attract investment back to Birmingham and bring new life to the city centre.

The population of Birmingham is now in excess of 1,000,000 and it is the largest single city government authority in Britain.[3] An investigation by the Birmingham City Council's Strategic Policy and Planning Unit found that during the 1980s the population was steadily declining as a result of 'out-migration' and that in the 1990s this would lead to an 'increasing proportion of relatively disadvantaged groups such as the poor, the less-skilled, lone parents, ethnic minorities and the very elderly' (BCC, 1991:7). Already in 1989 it was estimated that 37% of the city's total population were

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[3] London now comprises several 'boroughs', each with its own separate council and Education Department.

living on or below the poverty line and 13% were eligible for support and housing benefits (1991:18). By 1991 the unemployment rate had reached 12.3% which was significantly higher than national average levels.

Regarding the ethnic composition of the population, it was found that although Birmingham's black and ethnic minority communities[4] only comprised 18% of the city's total population in 1986, these communities were concentrated in the inner-city areas where they comprised 42% of the population (1991:13).

Population growth trends indicated that between 1984 and 1994 the primary school going population would rise by 15%, with this bulge of learners moving to senior secondary schools during the years 1995-2001 (1991:5).

In response to these trends, the present Labour Party-led City Council identified the provision of education, health and community services as their priorities (Rashid, pers.comm. 24/1/96).

4. Birmingham City Council

Birmingham is the largest metropolitan district council in Britain. At the time of the investigation the City Council comprised 117 democratically elected Councillors, their political party affiliation being: Labour 75, Conservative 28 and Liberal Democrat 14. The Lord Mayor, Cllr Sir David Roy, presided over Council meetings and performed ceremonial functions such as the opening of schools and exhibitions. The Councillors elected one of their colleagues as Council Leader. This is the City's most important political and governance position. The position was held by a Labour Party councillor, Ms Theresa Stewart.

The City Council had 17 committees, each responsible for a particular function and also 8 joint Sub-Committees for inter-disciplinary matters (BCC, 1995g). Each Sub-Committee comprised representatives from their constituent Committees. For example, the Children's Policy Sub-Committee was a joint committee of the Economic Development, Education, Finance and Leisure Services and Social Services Committees. However this Sub-Committee was said to be ineffective because it held no real power, resources, or administrative support and required great effort to convene. Furthermore, it had not developed a particular vision (Howell, 26/2/96).

There were also Ward Sub-Committees for each of the City's 39 wards. These Sub-Committees comprised the 3 City Councillors from each ward. Report-back meetings provided a mechanism by which members of the public could play a full role in local issues and maintain regular contact with their elected representatives (BCC, 1995g).

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[4] The report stated that minority communities comprise about one third Afro-Caribbean, one third Pakistani and the remaining people being predominantly of other Asian origin, e.g. from India and East Africa.

The Council delivered services amounting to a gross value of £1.8 billion to more than one million people (BCC,1995a:3). To execute and administer Council Committees' decisions, there were 11 directorates and two departments, one of which was the Education Department, headed by a Chief Executive Officer (BCC, 1995g). More than 37,000 people were employed by the City (*Birmingham Voice*, 1995:15).

The estimated net expenditure for 1995/96 was £960,509,000 of which £460,083,000 was to be spent on education including teachers' salaries (BCC,1995d). The education allocation was almost three times as high as the next amount, very starkly showing that education was the City's highest expenditure item and would inevitably attract the keen attention of tax payers. The leisure services expenditure of almost £70 million included central and community libraries. Of capital expenditure estimates, housing was the priority (£51.8 million), with education being fourth with an estimated expenditure of £13 million.

The Council's approach, as evident in the 1994/95 Annual Report theme, 'Pride in the Community', (Birmingham Voice, 1995:2) indicates Birmingham City Council's efforts to be a 'community government' as expounded in the writings of John Stewart (1995).

5. The LEA system of Birmingham

In 1995, an article in the national *Guardian* newspaper (MacLeod, 1995) referred in a positive sense to the City's schools as 'the Birmingham Revolution' and quoted Prof Ted Wragg of Exeter University as saying that:

> *Other cities, in Britain and elsewhere, are watching [Birmingham] with great interest. Some city somewhere has to crack the problems of urban education in a demanding and rapidly changing world, and Birmingham is in a very strong position to succeed.*

Birmingham's schooling system was not always the subject of such keen interest. As recently as 1993 the education system was in such crisis that the City appointed the Birmingham Education Commission, under the leadership of Prof Wragg, to investigate education in Birmingham, identify the main problems and make recommendations for improvement (BEC, 1995a:1-2). After hearing nearly 100 witnesses and receiving over 100 written submissions from various stakeholders, the Commission found that problems were primarily around:

> *poor communications, lack of resources and ... that the aspirations for the children of Birmingham were too low to meet the demands of the 21st century'* (BEC, 1995a:1).

In an interview (Brighouse, 22/2/96), the CEO of the Education Department referred to the impact this crisis was having on employees of the Department:

> *Lots of people felt very beseiged, very much like they'd been through a bad patch and they'd always got blamed for everything. ... They'd just been through a huge bloodbath to get rid of half the Advisory Service.*

However, educational problems were not the only ones facing the City. From the perspective of one City Councillor (Howell, 26/2/96), the rationale in 1995 for the City to prioritise education was grounded in a dichotomy of fear and hope:

- **Fear**
  Having been a prosperous and developed city in the past, Birmingham faced high levels of unemployment with social consequences for the future:

  > *This was an area with reasonably high levels of unemployment in terms of a lot of low skilled, semi-skilled jobs in the manufacturing industry where massive unemployment was unknown until about the year of 1973 ...* (Howell, 26/2/96)

  Birmingham was also increasingly becoming a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural city with a growing need for social cohesion:

  > *Birmingham could be the first city in Britain to go down a North American route and development in the worst aspects of that. ... By the end of the decade, 50% of young people in our schools will be black and ethnic minority backgrounds ... To go down the line of the kind of developments we've seen in North America ... we certainly didn't want to be in a position like Detroit or the worst aspects of Chicago ...* (Howell, 26/2/96)

  School principals were disenchanted by the lack of responsiveness of the City's leadership and the 1988 legislation's provision for schools to opt out of the LEA gave them leverage in their discussions with the LEA:

  > *Secondary heads privately warned the Chairman of the Education Committee and leading politicians that if they did not do something in terms of funding education, they would all leave the [LEA] system. [The LEA] was frightened of a cascade* (Knight, 28/2/96).

- **Hope**
  Education was seen as the preventive measure required to counter the City's fears of greater unemployment and social conflict.

  > *...People realise that if there's going to be any hope, long term hope for their communities, then they have to give their youngsters the best start in life. ... education is at the heart of our long term economic development strategy [and] looking at education in the long term of economic development of Birmingham, has been one of the ways in which we've*

> *succeeded in getting more money and capturing people's imaginations* (Howell, 26/2/96).

Placing education at the top of the City's agenda was therefore not simply driven by an appreciation of the innate value of education for the individual, but was based on an understanding of the complex relatedness of education to society's economic development and the promotion of social cohesion as an alternative to race and class conflict. The effect of prioritising education over urban renewal was immediately seen in greater resources being allocated to schooling. For example, the new Education Department CEO's first budget requested £40 million more than previous education budgets and the City proclaimed its commitment to maintain greater resourcing of schools in the Primary and Secondary Guarantees (see below).

Community-based organisations (CBOs), for practical and financial reasons, were compelled to respond to the economic implications ahead of the City's decision-makers:

> *As we moved through the 1980s, a lot of community-based organisations who had got involved in temporary employment schemes, began to shift, partly because the money began to move away from those* (Howell, 26/2/96).

Thus, in 1993 the Birmingham Education Commission's recommendations comprised 25 targets with regard to the nature and structure of the LEA, standards and achievements in schools, buildings and resources. Very shortly after the publication of the Wragg Commission's report, Prof Tim Brighouse was appointed as the CEO of the City's Education Department (Brighouse, 1993). This was soon followed by the election of a new Chairperson, Cllr Andy Howell, for the Education Committee. The positive climate created by the intervention of the impartial evaluator (Wragg) and the collaboration of the new Education Committee's Chairperson and Education Department's CEO, persuaded the City Council to place education at the top of its political agenda.

In 1995, the Birmingham Education Commission was reconvened to review the progress made since the publication of their first report in 1993. Fourteen public hearings were held and the Commission reported that encouraging progress had been made in hitting several of the original 25 targets, 14 of which were specifically related to the LEA (BEC, 1995a:1-15). It was this conclusion which led to the acclaim in the *Guardian*.

If an education 'revolution' had begun in Birmingham, it could be that the coincidence of these three fortuitous events (the Commission, Brighouse's appointment and Howell's election) was the active agent and provided the focus and initiative for positive change to commence:

> *When I'd been appointed, [Council] told me that they realised that education was a vital part of transforming life's chances, which made it more important in an industrial city 'cos of the changing employment*

> *prospects. And therefore they were serious about education, and we established that [vision] when I was being appointed. ... I soon got to know [Andy Howell] and I got on really, really well with him. The Commission was a marvellous opportunity for everyone 'cos people could draw a line under what had been and say 'well, what we gonna do?'* (Brighouse, 22/2/96).

The impact of these events was confirmed in the Commission's 1995 report (BEC, 1995a:4) and, almost without exception, supported by all the people interviewed or consulted, including Brighouse and Howell themselves.

It is significant that the Commission's first four of fourteen recommendations regarding the LEA related directly to the focus of this research (BEC, 1995a:3):

- give education top priority and appropriate standing in the coming years;
- recognise the changed nature of the relationship between schools and the LEA;
- improve the political climate in which education works;
- clarify the roles of, and relationship between, elected members and officers, so unnecessary confusion does not occur.

Thus education became the heart of Birmingham's long term economic development and social cohesion strategy and strategies were implemented to get the whole City behind the thrust to improve education, because it was recognised that neither the Education Committee nor the Education Department could achieve this alone.

5.1. The current Education Committee and Department of Education

The Education Committee comprised councillors, of whom two were elected by the Council as chairperson and vice chairperson and two 'recommended' voting members represented the Anglican and Catholic churches. At the time of the study, the Education Committee comprised 25 elected councillors representing the interests of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties (see Appendix 6.2). In terms of gender composition there were 7 women and 20 men. The Education Committee also had four sub-committees: Education services and special needs; Appeals; Leisure, learning and employment support; and Art, culture and economy.

Since the 1993 recommendations of the Birmingham Education Commission, the Council, through the Education Committee's budget, had placed education at the top of the City's agenda:

> *because people want to believe that education can make a difference. They desperately want to believe that. Otherwise the future's awful* (Brighouse, 22/2/96).

This shift in priorities was communicated to members of the public through various documents, one of which was the Birmingham Primary Guarantee (BCC, 1995b):

> *... In 1994-95 and 1995-96 the increase [in budget] was in both cases 1%; in subsequent years the increase will vary according to the Government's treatment of the City's budget settlement. However, the City is guaranteeing to give priority to education resulting in an increase in real terms in the budget for primary education.*

Some political leaders had, however, expressed concern about whether the City could sustain such commitments (BEC, 1995a:5). The measures taken by the LEA to balance the 1996-97 education budget in the face of greater cuts and imposed ceiling limitations by central government indicated that this had indeed become difficult, but that the Council was not ready to renege on commitments such as the guarantee (Education Committee meeting, 22/2/96). The CEO indicated in an interview that in order to deliver on that commitment there would be a shrinkage of the Education Department's administrative personnel and that the next financial year was anticipated to be 'extraordinarily difficult at the centre'.

The Education Department was structured hierarchically with a CEO and a Deputy CEO sharing responsibility for the nine divisions. Heads of Special education, Schools services and support, Financial resources, Planning, Personnel and staffing, and the Ethnic minority support unit reported directly to the Deputy CEO, while Advisory services, Management and co-ordination, Citiserve (catering and cleaning) and Curriculum support service divisions reported to the CEO. For better implementation of the equal opportunities and multi-cultural policy, organisational links existed between the Ethnic minority support unit and the Personnel and staffing and Advisory services divisions.

Communication with the City's communities was identified by both the Birmingham Education Commission (BEC, 1993) and the CEO (interview 22/2/96) as crucial for accountability between the Education Committee, the Education Department, schools, teachers, parents, learners and other members of the public. Various communication strategies were used by the Department: face-to-face meetings (discussed below), telecommunications, broadcast media and publications, some of which are mentioned below.

The City Council published almost 25,000 copies of the *Birmingham Voice*, a free weekly newspaper delivered to every household and distributed from community and neighbourhood offices, libraries and information kiosks. Although this publication covered general community news and information about the city and had a special issue that served as the City's annual report, it was an important communication vehicle for the Education Department to inform learners, parents, teachers, governors and other interested citizens about developments in the City's schools.

Numerous documents were published by the Education Department for a wide range of audiences, only a sample of which will be mentioned.

- A pocket-size brochure of key facts about schools and the Education Committee was compiled for interested members of the public (BCC, 1995d).

- Schools were provided with a regularly updated loose leaf directory titled *Guide to services* (BCCED, 1995c). The detailed Guide gave the City's schools an overview, with contact information, of the complete range of services available to them through the City Council (see Appendix 5.6). This assistance covered support regarding the curriculum, management, maintenance and direct services and for parents, pupils and the community. In addition it included information about joint activities with other sectors, such as business.

- The *Education Bulletin* was a free bi-monthly newsletter for teachers at Birmingham's schools. This periodical had short discursive and topical articles, reports on recent events, notices for forthcoming events, news about awards and city-wide plans of the Education Department (such as the promotional 'Year of Information Technology').

- A full colour glossy brochure about Birmingham's schooling system was targetted at those considering a teaching career in the City (BCCED, 1995b). Although the intention was clearly of a promotional nature, nevertheless this brochure informed prospective teachers about the City's schools, employment and equal opportunity policies and selection process, as well as the salary scale and conditions of service.

During the course of the investigation some educationists sceptical of the 'Birmingham revolution' suggested to me that these communication mechanisms were not so much accountability measures but were rather indicative of the CEOs clever use of the media for publicity purposes only.

> *Birmingham City Council is committed to equality of opportunity and justice throughout our organisation. We positively welcome applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people, irrespective of gender, race, disability, colour, ethnic or national origin, nationality, sexuality, marital status, responsibility for dependents, religion, trade union activity and age (up to 65, of course). That is not just something we say. We are actively taking steps to ...* (BCCED, 1995b)

Although this quotation was taken from a promotional brochure, the public nature of this commitment exemplifies the courage of Birmingham City in tackling the issue of equal opportunities within a society that accepted its diversity. In the City's *Education for our multicultural society* policy statement (BCC, [n.d.]), a commitment is given to establish a strong multi-cultural, anti-racist, equal opportunity perspective in all the City's institutions, including schools. The aims are three-fold:

- awareness and countering racism and discriminatory practices;

- awareness and provision for particular needs of pupils regarding their ethnic, cultural, historical, linguistic and religious backgrounds;

- preparation of pupils for life in a multi-cultural society and building on the strengths of cultural diversity.

In order to effect these aims, all personnel employed in the City's schools and services, and governing bodies are required to commit themselves to several objectives. This commitment is made within the context of Birmingham's Curriculum Statement which states that each child is entitled to have opportunity to access the curriculum, to contribute to the learning process and to be shown esteem and that they are valued. Education for living in a multi-cultural society is identified as being 'quality education' and thus schools are encouraged to identify quality gaps and to embark on Quality Development Action Plans.

During visits to schools whose learners were largely from Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities, there was clear evidence of the practice of this policy in the frequent written use of various mother-tongue languages especially in the primary schools, displays which celebrated current religious festivals of a variety of faiths and a dress-code and lunch menu which accommodated diverse cultural practices. All the libraries that were visited had growing collections of books published in the languages spoken by local communities. In terms of personnel, most of the schools still had a preponderence of white teachers and appointment of ethnic minority teachers was only hampered by their scarcity. In primary schools, teaching assistants were often from the local community, which enabled greater mother-tongue interaction with each learner.[5]

Both the political and executive leadership of the LEA, as well as head teachers, confirmed in interviews that the closest partner of the Education Department and schools was the City's Leisure and Community Services Department. This cooperation took the form of dual use of school sites for community adult education and youth centres ('we share premises, we share staff, we share customers' (Worsley, 28/2/96), joint campaigns such as the 'Year of Reading' (1995), the 'Year of Information Technology' (1996) and the Leisure for Learning programme which introduced families with very young children to the City's recreational and educational facilities.

Brighouse (22/2/96) indicated that the local education authority is a systemic notion based on legal, managerial, resource and communication relationships. He challenged the notion of a local education *authority* as a misnomer because legislation has removed authority from local government (Brighouse, 1996:7), and more recent legislation has stated that City Councils are not obliged to have Education Committees to perform their educational functions (22/2/96). Furthermore, Brighouse emphasised that the term is used loosely by Education Department officials, principals and the public alike and applied most often in references to CEOs and chairpersons of Education Committees.

He has proposed that the term local education *council* (LEC) should be preferred, in order to mark the end of the former LEA era and to more accurately describe the governance structure at city level as the counterpart of central government and the school. Brighouse's suggestion points to the blurring that presently exists in the British

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5 Languages spoken in Birmingham include Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujurati, Hindi, Pushto, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Jamaican and other creoles, Japanese, Malay and Greek.

public mind and which was mentioned as a problem in the 1993 report of the BEC, 1995a, between the local government's decision-making structure (Education Committee) and the executive or administrative structure (Education Department).

5.2 Statistics on schooling in Birmingham

In January 1995 there were 326 primary schools and 62 secondary schools in the state sector in Birmingham (BCC, 1995d). These schools included 28 Church of England, 63 Roman Catholic and other aided schools which were maintained by the LEA, but excluded grant-maintained schools because these had 'opted-out' of the LEA system to have a direct funding relationship with central government and govern themselves. Although in 1993, 13 schools had left the Birmingham LEA, Brighouse reported to the 1995 Commission that only one school had opted out in the two intervening years (BEC, 1995a:5). This indicated that the relationship between schools and the LEA had improved considerably and the trend among schools to break their links with the Council had been checked.

The statistical analysis of school enrolments in January 1995 indicated that there was a total of 151,244 learners (BCC, 1995h).[6] Of these, 98,359 were primary school learners and 49,828 secondary school learners. In addition, 3,057 learners were enrolled at special schools. A Birmingham City Education Department survey of ethnicity in 1994 found that almost two thirds of all learners were white (BCC, 1995d):

	Total %
White	60.2
Pakistani	16.7
Afro-Caribbean	8.0
Indian	7.8
Bangladeshi	3.4
Mixed Race	2.3
Other	1.7

There were 4,318 full-time and 274 part-time teachers in primary schools, and 2,944 full-time and 167 part-time teachers in secondary schools (BCC, 1995d). Special schools employed 488 full-time and 34 part-time teachers. Governing bodies decided, in relation to the school's budget, the number of teachers and teaching assistants they were able to afford at their school and were involved in the interviewing and selection process but the Education Department employed the teaching staff and paid their salaries out of the school's allocation. This separation of particular responsibilities was part of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) scheme (DFE, 1994b:41). The Education Department employed many other personnel in administrative and support service positions. In total (including teachers), there were 8,569 (84.6%) women and 3,331 (15.4%) men employed. The ethnic backgrounds of all employees were declared to be 87% white/European, 7% Asian, 4% Afro-Caribbean, 1% 'other' and 1% who did not disclose this information (BCCED, 1995a).

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[6] This total excludes nursery school enrolments.

Legislation allowed the LEA to appoint citizens on a voluntary basis to the governing body of each City school, the number of these governors being determined by the enrolment of the school (DFE, 1994b:3). These powers create the opportunity for an Education Committee to have party political interests represented on governing bodies with the potential to impact on their political balance (Davies, pers.comm. 14/3/96). Evidence from the Small Heath Secondary School indicated that when the school's governing body was considering the merits of grant maintained status, although the LEA appointed governors were not able to significantly influence the outcome of the decision, nevertheless their party political tendencies were apparent. At the time of this investigation, the LEA was entitled to appoint governors to a total number of 1,309 posts. However, only 896 posts (68%) were filled (BCCED, 1996d). Vacancies were due to the scarcity of volunteers (Rashid, pers.comm. 24/1/96).

During the years 1990-96 there were 10 closures among the City's schools (BCCED, 1996b). These included the closure of one nursery school, seven mergers of junior and infant schools resulting in re-openings as primary schools and one merger and one closure at secondary school level. The majority of these had resulted from falling enrolments, attended in some cases by insufficient funds being generated to meet overhead costs. However, in addition to the above reasons, the mergers in the primary level were also attributed to endeavors to improve curriculum continuity and management.

5.3 Overview of services to schools

In an information booklet to parents with young children (BCC, 1995e) the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Prof Tim Brighouse, stated that the Birmingham Education Department's aim was to:

> *...improve against previous best so that each generation of children sets new and ever higher standards of what can be achieved.*

This focus on quality was articulated through the Department's acknowledgement of the value of teachers, a commitment to 'help every school to be a successful school' and to provide learners with a 'range of opportunities ... that best meet their needs'. To assure parents of this commitment, the Birmingham Council and their schools provided parents with a Primary or Secondary guarantee (depending on their educational stage). These guarantees set out their planned improvements in resource provision, the guaranteed standards offered through support services such as the School Library Services, the key experiences such as museum visits which every Birmingham child had as a right and the targets for improved standards, for example, in reading and mathematics.

It was also evident that Birmingham recognised that it was now a city of many languages and cultures. The City aimed to help children understand this and respect one another by encouraging their schools to build on the diverse experiences which children brought to school so that they realised that all values and cultures were important in the modern world and to provide for the particular needs of children with diverse linguistic, cultural and historical backgrounds (BCC, 1995e:13).

As required by law, a Birmingham Curriculum Statement provided a detailed curriculum guideline for use within the City's schools (BCC, 1995e:7; BCC,[n.d.b]). This Statement was developed within the framework of the National Curriculum comprising the basic core of English, Mathematics and Science and seven other foundational subjects, with a modern language added in Secondary School years. Ensuring the implementation of the National Curriculum was therefore delegated by central government by legislation to local government (and school governing bodies). The Statement also included the locally developed Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. This was a responsiblity devolved to local authorities (as expanded on below). Birmingham had a group of specialist teachers to assist schools with those children whose home language was not English and who needed help to have full access to the Curriculum (BCC, 1995e:8).

For those school learners with special education needs, the City provided 21 specialist units. These units offered special services for children with needs related to speech and language delays, hearing, sight and physical difficulties. In addition the City had 29 day-scholar and 4 residential special schools. Where necessary, the City provided transport between home and school for children with special needs. This service could be in the form of a taxi, coach, specially designed vehicle or a guide on the bus or train.

Birmingham City offered a variety of services for which schools were not directly responsible:

- Learners with particular problems were able to use the services of the City's Education Welfare Service, Psychological Service and Behavioural Support Service, Visiting Teacher Services, Tuition Service and Curricula Support Service.

- Information, advice and guidance concerning the learner's rights to education were available through a telephone Education Rights Advice Line.

- The cost of public transport was provided if the learner's nearest appropriate school was beyond the qualifying distance, measured by the shortest available walking route, for his/her age group.

- Nutritionally balanced lunches and refreshments were provided, administered centrally by a catering service. Meals took into account the religious, cultural and dietary needs of the learners. Learners whose parents received income support were entitled to receive free meals.

- The School Health Service ensured that after starting the first year of school, each child was seen by a health team. School nurses, eye, hearing and dental specialists, regularly visited schools and notified parents if treatment was required. Immunisation was also administered.

- Invitations were made to attend special events at the City's museums, parks, environmental centres, recreational centres and halls, botanic gardens, libraries, theatres and cultural centres.

- Those children who wished to play instruments or sing were able to use the City's Music Service and join a choir, orchestra or band.

5.4 Financing schooling

One of central government's primary objectives since the reform of the 1988 ERA, was to:

> *...give local institutions greater autonomy to run their affairs [and] at the same time to make those institutions more accountable to students, parents, employers and taxpayers* (DfEE, 1995:1).

This was clearly exemplified in the differentiated financial responsibilities and relationships of the Birmingham LEA and the City's schools. However, the financial relations between central, local and institutional levels was complex and carried inherent tensions because of the polarising of power to central government and schools, while local government had the responsibility to disburse grants and make ends meet.

The LEA was responsible for (DfEE, 1995:9):

- funding the City's schools within the Local Management of Schools scheme;[7]
- distributing central government grants; and
- providing a miscellany of other services to schools, such as health, cultural, recreational, psychological and welfare services, meals and transport and special grants.

Of the LEA's total expenditure, about 80% was received from national revenue and the rest came from the City's 'Council Tax' (DfEE, 1995:9). In accordance with their priorities, the City Council decided how much of its budget would be earmarked for education. Additional resources in the form of specific grants were channelled through the LEA.

From this education vote, there were several mandatory expenses (such as educational psychology and welfare services) and some discretionary items (such as pupil support, school meals and transport grants). These were first allocated from the General Schools' Budget before any other deductions. At least 85% of the remaining amount, referred to as the Potential Schools' Budget, was to be delegated to schools. Thus a maximum of 15% of the Potential Schools' Budget was available for the City's Department of Education and other services such as curriculum advisors, school library and museum services and maintenance services. The 85% was termed the Aggregated Schools Budget and was shared between all the City's schools in accordance with the

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[7] The LMS scheme would typically require the governing body *inter alia* to live within their budget, follow the LEA's guidelines when entering into contracts and to provide regular and accurate records of expenditure and income.

LEA's funding formula. Schools (through their governing bodies) then decided how they wanted to spend the portion of the budget delegated to them.

The formula, based on principles specified by the national government, was used to determine the budget for each school. Of this, 80% was derived from criteria including factors such as the age of learners, pre-school places offered at the school, sixth form subjects on offer, special education needs and special units. The remaining 20% of the budget was determined by other factors such as the size of the school, the nature and age of the premises, salary variations arising from the qualifications and experience of staff, and allocations for additional special needs (i.e. social deprivation and/or learning difficulties). Despite allocations being formula-driven, there remained sufficient flexibility in the national formula and principles for the LEA to direct resources to schools with the greatest needs (Bullock, 1995).

The Council estimated that in 1995/96 their net service costs per primary school learner were £1,736 and for secondary school learners £2,468 (BCC, 1995f). Although this unevenness was historically driven by factors such as the assumption that secondary education requires more highly qualified (and thus paid) teachers than primary education, there was evidence that since 1993 Birmingham City was questioning this argument and considering early childhood and primary education as better investments:

> *We now know from research and practice in the United States and Europe the long term benefits that flow from a well resourced, structured and targeted set of provisions for education ... services from birth to age five ... in terms of savings in remedial and custodial experience in the teenage years and beyond. ... There is the need to focus appropriate additional resources, whether from health, housing, social service or from education, to ensure that in areas of great social need appropriate early experience pays off in savings later* (Brighouse, 1993:1-5).

There were three discernible implications from the financial arrangements described above. Firstly, the use of public funds opened the funding formula to public scrutiny and accountability. For example, the CEO indicated in an interview that in recent years the detail of the City's education budget was discussed more openly and contested by the Education Committee. Also, through the LMS scheme of schools having contractual agreements with the City's departments, stakeholders represented on governing bodies now had greater access to financial information about the running of schools and the costing of the City's services. Secondly, the delegation of financial management to schools gave them a great degree of autonomy for the day to day control of their budgets (Bullock, 1995). Thirdly; there was a contradiction in that central government that set the formula and capping decisions, did not have to share out the funds between schools or account to local communities for shortfalls in the school budget and as Tony Travers from the London School of Economics has suggested, this is damaging to democracy (Guardian, 20/2/96):

> *The cash available to an institution depends on a dozen or more factors, virtually all of which are outside the control of [local government]*

> *councils or schools, or both. [Central government] controls a number of key factors affecting finance ... the complex formula the Government uses to work out what each council needs to spend can change ... Spending capping rules can also be altered at the whim of the Environment secretary.*

5.5 Curriculum

The ERA legislation of 1988 prescribed a common national curriculum for all state schools in Britain. This has enabled central government to introduce a controversial and contested national schools inspection system which publishes school ratings in league tables.

> *Under the present system, schools are treated as though they are either perfect or total write offs. There is nothing between complete freedom of action and draconian punishments* (AMA, 1995).

Many publishers develop materials specifically geared to the national curriculum in anticipation of sales to school libraries (Heap, pers.comm.27/2/96).

Although the 1988 ERA imposed the national curriculum on LEAs, it retained and strengthened the responsibility of the LEA for religious education (Hull, pers.comm. 5/2/96). This was achieved through the joint mechanisms of a mandatory statutory council to be called the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). Both SACRE and ASC were established by the 1988 ERA legislation. The ASC advised the LEA on the religious education curriculum to be taught in the City's schools within the parameters of national requirements which stipulated that religious education was to be taught in all schools and that there should be daily collective worship of a Christian nature. Schools could appeal to a special sub-committee of SACRE if they felt that this was inappropriate in respect of learners attending the school. As a statutory structure of the LEA, SACRE had sole power to make this decision.

The ASC was not a permanent body because the LEA was required to convene it only when it was necessary to revise or consult religious groups about the religious education curriculum. When the ASC met it comprised four committees: Religions and Christian denominations other than the Church of England; Church of England; Teachers; and the LEA. Consensual decisions were essential because each committee had the right of veto. SACRE, on the other hand, was a permanent structure comprising representatives of all faiths. It advised the LEA on the implementation of the ASC's recommendations. It was customary for the Birmingham LEA to arrange for members of SACRE to be the same people comprising the ASC. Birmingham's current syllabus for religious education was said to be the first LEA syllabus in Britain to displace the Christian hegemony of the previous syllabi (Hull, pers.comm. 5/2/96). This trend was evident in the CEO's comments about the press (22/2/96):

> *There's this huge story around separate worship [rights for followers of Islam] ... the press is racist, stirring the thing up in a racially-loaded,*

> *religiously-loaded way. My statements become more and more open about religion, saying 'Isn't it terrific, this period between Eid and Easter. We're taking this glorious opportunity to celebrate that we're a multi-faith city and what amazing tolerance that runs through all these things'. [The press] clearly don't like it and don't use any of the information I give them.*

The ASC and SACRE structures were significant in that they represented the only domains in which national government had allowed the LEA to retain full curricular control and management. It was speculated that this strategy was adopted by central government to avoid the controversial and locally sensitive nature of religious education and divert this responsibility to local government even though central government had centralised all other curricula.

Just as central government has appeared to avoid dealing with the difficult issue of religious education, it has also shed itself of provision and curriculation for special education needs and allocated this responsibility to local government authorities.

LEAs have to:

- identify and assess learners who require special education;
- supply special education support services to governing bodies;
- keep under review local education arrangements for special education;
- publish the Special Education Needs policy (Gray, pers.comm. 13/06/96)

5.6 Library Services

Birmingham's Central Library is one of the City's busiest buildings. It was estimated that more than 6,5 million books would be borrowed from the City's Central Library and Community Libraries in various neighbourhoods during the 1995/96 year; however the estimates were not disaggregated to show the proportion of loans to school age learners (BCC, 1995f).

A few years prior to this investigation the City's Central Library researched what school learners in Birmingham wanted libraries to provide them.

> *One of the things was that they were less interested in fiction which for [librarians] had always been very important, and they saw the library as providing information. They weren't saying they didn't read fiction and they didn't want to, but they were much clearer about what the library was for them than we [as librarians] were. It's made us stop and think. And now we do look very closely at information* (Heap, 27/2/96).

Library spaces specifically geared towards the information needs of children and youth have since been developed in response to their findings. A trendy Youth Information

Shop was opened adjacent to the Central Library and contained a vast collection of take-away and reference-only brochures and pamphlets, and functioned as a meeting place and advice centre.

For the most part however, the City's libraries were used by individual school learners primarily for homework purposes and as a study space. To this end, the librarians carefully selected a suitable collection of materials to supplement the books directly related to the national curriculum and which were frequently found in school libraries. Each of the City's libraries maintained a 'homework collection' comprising small boxes of books each on a particular theme from project and curriculum work being studied by learners from nearby schools. These books were gathered together in response to requests from learners or on notification from the school and were then placed on reference for a short period of time.

During holiday periods, the City's libraries hosted activities for children. In the past these had been less focussed on the library; however, in recent years the City's librarians have concentrated on promoting reading and the enjoyment of reading:

> *The main purpose is to encourage them to use the library and to become readers and to see the library as somewhere that they want to visit and to get the benefit of access to books and enjoyment of reading, through performance or through activity* (Heap, 27/2/96).

The City's libraries also recognised the importance of children having access to books in their home languages. Each library had a collection of languages spoken by the ethnic minorities in Birmingham:

> *Most of the Community Libraries will have some of the 'community' language material or dual language books. ... There are a lot of parents who want their child to learn, for example, Punjabi, even though they're English speaking. Really English is their first language in one sense, but their parents want them to see and write in their own language* (Heap, 27/2/96).

Although the services described above were targetted at the individual school learner, the City's libraries also supported schools and teachers in Birmingham. In 1995, there was a city-wide campaign called the 'Year of Reading' which was strongly supported by the City Council, the Education Department and the Leisure and Community Services Department. As part of this campaign, the City's Libraries and the Education Department collaborated on a Volunteer Reader programme for schools. Adults from all walks of life volunteered to go into schools and to read to children and teenagers. A training workshop prepared these volunteers and reoriented them to contemporary children's literature and services of libraries. The Volunteer Reader programme was so successful that it was continued even after the 'Year of Reading' campaign ended.

Through the collaboration of the Departments of Education and Leisure and Community Services, Birmingham City schools had access to a School Library Service (SLS). In contrast to the services offered to individual learners through the City's

Central and Community Libraries, the SLS was directed at schools as institutions. It was managed and administered through the Department of Leisure and Community Services, but financed by the Department of Education. Initially this was a direct funding. However, with the introduction of the Local Management of Schools scheme, these funds were delegated to schools as an entitlement to library service and support.

From a menu of packages on offer, schools purchased services. Additional services in excess of their entitlement could be bought by the school using funds which were not otherwise earmarked in the school's allocation. Thus the SLS was now funded indirectly by the Department of Education, with schools selecting the package of library service and support that best suited them. A contractual relationship existed between the SLS and the school, with the SLS guaranteeing the service.

Three broad categories of services were offered:

- Advisory Service: This service was designed to support the School's library. It included drawing up development, budgetary and spending plans; staff appointments; developing a Whole School Library policy and Information Skills policy and programme; design and layout; audit of collection quality; collection development and weeding; library systems organisation, including information technology use; library promotion; inspection support; needs analysis; in-service training and education for staff and governors.

- Teachers' Loan Service: This was a curriculum oriented 'book box' service to supplement the resources available through the school's own library. The book box was lent to a specific teacher for classroom use. Box collections were kept for a term and comprised 30 items according to the teacher's specifications, a print-out of the loan items and their cash value and a service evaluation form. SLS delivered and collected boxes at the start and finish of each term. Lost and damaged items were charged to the school.

- Book Purchase Scheme: SLS maintained an exhibition collection of over 12,000 reviewed items which were currently available from publishers. These included reference works, picture books, story tapes, reading schemes, videos and CD ROMs. SLS generated a computerised order of books selected by the school. This was a free SLS service and schools received a 10% discount from publishers. Low cost jacketing and classification services were available.

These services were offered by the SLS professional advisors. When clerical support was necessary, for example with classifying and cataloguing books, SLS used the services of skilled casual workers.

5.7 Consultative Forums

Although there was no obligation in legislation for the LEA to establish consultative forums, in Birmingham such structures emerged between representatives of school principals, Birmingham's Education Department and the Education Committee. These Forums were initiated by principals prior to the convening of the 1993 Birmingham Education Commission because of their frustration with the City's leadership and the

deterioration of the schooling system. There were separate forums for secondary and primary school principals, with representatives comprising:

- principals representing each of the three areas of Birmingham schools;
- principal representing special schools;
- two Birmingham City Councillors from the Education Committee;
- CEO from the Education Department;
- several senior officers from the Education Department.

The stated aims of the forums were to develop a dialogue between the Education Committee, the CEO and head teachers; enable the views of principals to be clearly articulated to politicians (i.e. the Education Committee) so that principals could influence decision-making processes; and to provide a vehicle for politicians to explain the City's policies to principals and to consult with them concerning future formulations and developments (PHF, [n.d.]). These forums were initiated by principals and were accountable to them. Only principals from schools for which the LEA was responsible were involved in these forums.

Meetings were held once per term and the Education Department provided secretarial support and convened the meetings through liaison officers from the Head of Schools Support Service. An annual conference and newsletter were mechanisms to involve all principals in the Forum.

It was evident from the Forum meetings observed during this investigation that there was a climate of open dialogue, a positive and willing spirit of cooperation, a shared vision of the City's educational objectives and a clear and strategic sense of direction. The scope and depth of consultation and discussion are exemplified by the following list of issues discussed during these meetings:

- proposal from the CEO to introduce a 'Success for Everyone' school improvement programme;
- report concerning the reconceptualisation of the LEA's Education Welfare Service;
- wording in drafts of proposed communiques to schools;
- quality of service to schools from the City's architects and the division responsible for property maintenance
- report on the reorganisation and relocation of the City's Career Service;
- information from the national government's Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) concerning budget allocations; and

- strategies to minimise retrenchments of personnel as a result of proposed cutbacks by the City's Leisure Services.

Subsequent to the appointment of Tim Brighouse as CEO, the LEA recognised the value of such stakeholder forums. This led the Education Department to establish the Birmingham Governors' Forum (BGF) as a 'voice' for serving governors on a democratic, non-party political, non-sectarian basis. It ensured representation of the various stakeholders represented on governing bodies and provided a communication channel and mechanism for consultation and negotiation on policy matters. This forum also had links with the Head Teachers' Forums and the Education Department. It met at least twice a year.

It was evident from the lack of knowledge about this forum by both parent governors interviewed, that the Birmingham Governors' Forum was either still in a formative phase and that they had not yet heard of it or that communication mechanisms between those who attended forum meetings and their governing bodies, were ineffectual.

Nevertheless, for all these forums the CEO envisaged their greater involvement in influencing the City's policies and practices. The Chairperson of the Education Committee referred to the forums as being a 'new deal around accountability' both for the City Council to be more accountable to schools and for schools and governing bodies to be more accountable to local communities.

SECTION THREE

6. Discussion of the role of Birmingham's local government in the provision of schooling in the City

> *The LEA in the past had many powers of proposing and disposing, and controlling, authorising and directing. All that is past. Now the LEA has a different, more subtle and potentially more influential role* (Brighouse, 1993:3).

It was the 1988 Education Renewal Act (ERA) and subsequent amendments, including the 1993 Education Act, that led to the changed role of the LEA by centralising real power and direction at a national level and deconcentrating school management to institutional level. The DfEE (1995:21) maintains that LEAs still retain:

> *important roles in areas such as the planning of provision, funding, quality control and as sources of advice and guidance, but within that framework many decisions are taken at the level of individual institutions.*

This would appear to accommodate flexibility for local governments to interpret policy texts differently albeit within the confinement of a legislated framework regulated by a central government, thus supporting the theoretical arguments of both Bowe et al and Ranson.

Although each British city may define its role in the provision of schooling differently from other cities, both the documentary and interview data provided overwhelming evidence that Birmingham City's role was inspired and underpinned by the vision articulated and authored by the CEO, Prof Tim Brighouse, and through his proactive leadership.

The CEO categorically rejected the notion that the City's role in relation to schooling was as a provider of services. Already in 1993, the newly appointed CEO proposed the following roles for the City in providing for its schools (Brighouse, 1993):

- developing partnerships based on a consensus of shared values and expectations of various stakeholders at local government and institutional level, to improve education provision and to facilitate greater availability of resources;
- guardianship of the quality education aspirations of the Birmingham community;
- guarantor of equitable (fair deal) education for all children and 'last resort' support to those with special needs;
- planning and developing a vision for future needs.

These roles were premised on a recognition that schools were overburdened by the regulations and tasks of the LMS scheme and were under great formula-driven budgetary, performance and outcome pressures. Thus, the CEO recommended that the envisaged role of the City would continue to provide advisory and support services to schools only on the basis of a primary role of ensuring quality learning and teaching through a rigorous school improvement programme. The City would perform overall education planning in consultation with other stakeholders and enact other statutory responsibilities such as provision for special educational needs and ensuring school attendance.

By 1996 the CEO had further developed his conceptualisation of the City's role by describing it as having three primary aspects: securing or guaranteeing provision, setting a climate and planning. The partnership role articulated by the CEO in 1993 appeared to be no longer specific to Birmingham and instead referred to the relationship between local authorities and schools as stipulated in legislation. However, it was still an over-arching role of developing cooperation between parents, teachers, learners and local government. In a slightly different configuration of partnership, a school principal articulated this role as being obligatory because of the Council's structures which separated schooling from adult education even though the City is supportive of the notion of lifelong learning:

> *I don't think it makes sense for a school to be functioning under the Education Department's systems during the daytime for children and as soon as the clock gets to 3:30 it switches to adult education and moves to another Department. The administration is a nonsense to my mind. I think it would be better if Birmingham City Council delivered education to all ages through a single structure. But they don't do that. Because they don't, we have to have a very carefully managed relationship - a close partnership - 'cos they're using our classrooms, our teachers, our offices. If there wasn't that partnership it would be a disaster. And it is in some schools* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

The CEO identified 9 principles which underpinned the roles played by the City. Of these, the CEO subscribed especially to the first five and indicated that the others were more commonly articulated by City Councillors:

- success is for everyone, rather than failure for many or some;
- inclusive, rather than exclusive, practices;
- intelligence is multi-faceted, rather than being general and inherited;
- lifelong learning should be promoted rather than education being a once and for all experience;
- improvements should be competitively based against one's own previous best performance and not against other people;

- learning and teaching environments should be safe spaces;
- access to education for all;
- equality to ensure success for everyone;
- transparency in disclosing information about processes and decision-making.

The triadic model of firstly, the outsider's voice providing the analysis of the problems and prescription for action; secondly, the elected representative with political will and authority and thirdly, the executive office with the capacity and resources, have provided the platform for the consensual vision to develop. This model has enabled Birmingham to explore a new role based on these values and principles.

6.1 Guarantor of provision

The guarantorial role placed limits on the former 'provider' role even while it continued it. Thus, although the City continued to offer schools some services as in pre-1988 days, there was a shift from providing a comprehensive service to ensuring that schools received services from one or another provider. This made the City's departments and schools vulnerable to outside competition and brought an end to the off-hand 'take-it-or-leave-it' style of city bureaucracies. The City was compelled to focus on quality. The emphasis was less on provision than on guaranteeing that schools would operate effectively and continually improve qualitatively. Measures were introduced which ensured or guaranteed that there was equity for learners in the City and that schools received quality services.

In terms of equity for learners, the Education Department had developed equal opportunity and multi-cultural policies. Anyone who felt that the appropriate structures were not adequately effecting equity, was able to approach the Education Department directly through the Education Rights telephone service. Customer satisfaction surveys of schools had been conducted, and just as schools were setting targets for school improvement, so the City's departments also practiced target setting, measuring and monitoring of quality of the service being provided. This led to a system of entitlements which publicly guaranteed educational experiences and tied the City to levels of quality education and training. Furthermore, the forums functioned as structures through which the LEA was able to receive information regarding schools' needs and the acceptability of services they bought or received freely from the City.

The City had no monopoly on providing services to schools even though some of the services were provided in accordance with legislative requirements. In fact, for some services such as catering of school meals, the City's supplier was in competition with commercial suppliers. This right to choose was enthusiastically defended by the CEO even though he acknowledged the conflict of interests between schools and those employed by the Education Department under his leadership:

> *I don't mind outdoing the other [providers]. I reckon that whatever we are responsible for we ought to be so good at it that [no schools] would dream of going elsewhere. ... Deep down [the employees] know that I'm more interested in defending the right of schools to select where they want to buy things from, than I am in defending them as the employer* (Brighouse, 22/2/96).

6.2 Vision and leadership

By enacting the leadership and visionary role, the City was setting a climate for schools to be institutions that were offering learning and teaching experiences fundamentally different from school experiences in the past. The City was encouraging educationists to be 'ambitious' and 'daring' in their expectations regarding school improvements by seizing opportunities to reassert and reaffirm raised expectations. It was anticipated that higher expectations and holding staff, especially teaching staff, in high esteem, would raise standards of educational achievement in schools and break the downward spiral of school deterioration. However, if the City was to be realistic about its declaration of being a 'learning city, committed to lifelong learning', this had to be more substantive than mere sloganeering and rhetoric about learning. In this new climate schools could explore new roles and confidently ask questions about learning and teaching and how schools could improve educational experiences.

The CEO's leadership facilitated the process by which the City as a whole developed a a shared vision comprising agreed goals and outcomes and then used this consensual vision as a platform from which to further exercise the leadership necessary to put the vision into effect. It was evident that principals expected the City to play a leadership role in developing the shared educational vision for the people of Birmingham:

> *They need to recognise, and help schools realise, that education happens outside these buildings. Children don't stop obtaining education when they go away from us. And we need to imagine an education system of the future which is structured so that the learning opportunities that are out there are included in the structured experiences of our students, and that you don't stop learning when you've reached school leaving age, you don't stop being part of the structured education system at that point, but that it runs on through life ... the Local Authority and City Council need to have a clear idea of this and need to share this continuously with schools* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

A delicate balance of participation, agreement and recognition between leaders and stakeholders is essential for this approach to partnership to be successful. Within schools, a principal stated that although in the past there had been a lack of respect among LEA officials, school teachers and City Councillors, this had changed because the City now provided a leadership role around a consensual vision:

> *Andy Howell and Tim Brighouse have changed all [the lack of respect]. There is a sense of togetherness, partnership and importantly, respect, which wasn't here before ... It took someone of Tim Brighouse's charisma*

and international reputation and Andy Howell's rationalism and dedication, to pull this together (Worsley, 28/2/96).

6.3 Planning

This role was based on an understanding that an adequate response to learners', schools' and City's needs was more possible if considered regionally. In addition, the City's leadership expressed a realistic appreciation of the future's uncertainty in terms of employment possibilities and economic development in the next century. This had led the City to adopt a planning role by raising people's expectations of the next generation's achievements and encouraging schools, learners and service providers to set annual targets for themselves based on their previous best performance.

Interestingly, the Chairperson of the Education Committee dismissed the more systemic role of planning, clearly preferring those roles which were more firmly located within educational values in which the vision was about a 'professional debate' and what happened in the classroom. He associated the planning role with management values and the directorial approach and centralisation evident over the past 15 years during the Conservative government's education reform and which, because these values related to structural issues, were dismissed as being merely 'systemic' (Howell, 26/2/96). On the other hand, the Chairperson recommended the notion of an LEA development plan that could be drawn up through consultation with different stakeholder groups and which was clearly part of a planning role. This ambiguous stance appeared to have been located in party political posturing and was not essentially a rejection of a planning role.

Part of planning was the implementation of equitable baseline standards in response to local needs and circumstances. It was felt by a principal that this role could not be enacted by central government because it was too remote from schools, inaccessible and did not understand local dynamics:

> *We can't get local justice from central government. We can't get local understanding of our problems ... I can't talk to national government about [my school's needs] but I can talk to Councillors ... It's important that LEAs are there to understand and administer local equity and justice... I can pick up this telephone and I'm speaking to people who know me, who know the school. I don't have to go back through history to explain something. They're responsive* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

7. Critique of the role of the LEA

Various factors influenced the performance of these roles.

Legislation only gave limited powers to the Education Committee. It was a weakness that these roles were not embedded in legislation and thus they were adopted purely on

the grounds of local leadership and support, leaving local government with little power to ensure that policies developed at a local level were indeed practised:

> *We can issue policies from [City Council] and they sit on bookcases in schools and never get looked at* (Howell, 26/2/96).

In 1995, this was recognised by the AMA when it called for the role of local government in guaranteeing quality and raising achievement in schools, to be explicitly enshrined in law (AMA, 1995:10). Furthermore, AMA recommended that if the national school inspection system indicated that a school had a serious weakness or was failing to provide an adequate standard of education to all pupils, or if the LEA believed that the school was at risk of breaking the law, legislation should empower local governments to intervene and specify acceptable processes for intervention. Such provisions could also be conflict resolution mechanisms for schools (Howell, 26/2/96).

The 1988 ERA erosion of local government's statutory role in schooling had also had a negative impact on equitable education, pedagogic innovation and curriculum improvement, not only because it introduced the grant-maintained school model, but because central government's funding formula for schooling left little for the LEA to use for regional planning and discretionary use.

> *There is little left for the LEA to be creative and exercise its important functions of ensuring that there's justice throughout the system ... The LEA has no resources. It can't compensate for our disadvantage [of running a school on three sites] ... Exciting imaginative work that might be done in one school can't be taken by an advisor or inspector and then replicated, with a little bit of financial help, in other schools* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

Central government was perceived to be politically hostile and deliberately eroding the powers and capacity of local governments. This political tension was driven by a disjuncture of having different political parties (and hence different principles and values) being dominant and operating at the different governance levels. For example, at the time of this investigation the Conservative Party was in power at national parliamentary level but there was a Labour Party led City Council in Birmingham. Despite these tensions (or perhaps because of them), Birmingham's Labour-led Council had developed its own vision of education, independent of and in contrast to that of the Conservative national government and the City was also innovative in conceptualising a new role of local government in schooling.

It was evident that the CEO recognised the weakness of not having legislation which supported and ensured Birmingham's educational vision. He therefore introduced an alternative approach to institutionalising this vision and ensuring equitable baseline standards throughout Birmingham:

> *Brighouse has been very astute politically because he has tied the politicians to guarantees and charters which they are going to find very, very difficult to get out of* (Knight, 28/2/96).

Through central government legislation, market forces rather than educational principles became the predominant influence in the direction, planning and management of schools. This had both positive and negative outcomes. Schools controlled much of their budgets through the LMS scheme and governing bodies exercised great decision-making powers. Although the devolution of decision-making benefited schools in that decisions were taken at the point of delivery, leading to more effective school management, it led to a distancing between the City's education authorities and schools which did not exist in the past (Worsley, 28/2/96).

The LMS scheme had the advantage that schools were able to call for tenders for contractual supply of services such as catering, cleaning, career guidance and building and grounds maintenance. In the past the City's bureacracies would have provided these services willy-nilly with little regard to quality. However, most of these services were now in competition with commercial suppliers and this had the advantage of raising the quality and efficiency of the City's Departments (Brodie, 26/2/96; Worsley, 28/2/96).

On their own, the City's Education Committee and Education Department were unable to establish a climate conducive to school improvement and which would secure educational equity. Partnerships and alliances were therefore essential. The CEO and Chairperson of the Education Committee were constantly in communication and held consultations with various stakeholders so that the vision was indeed based on consensus and included as broad a participation as possible. This had a positive outcome because, for the LEA to be successful in its chosen roles, all those who had helped formulate the vision and establish education as the City's priority needed to participate in the implementing of these roles. This is consistent with the pluralist theoretical framework of a social contract comprising a complex network of partners (Ranson, 1995:428-432).

Positive attitudinal changes were seen to be critical for this to happen:

> *The biggest barrier of all probably lies potentially within or outside the classroom. It's something to do with the self-esteem of teachers, of staff, of parents and of pupils, and their expectations of each other and of what's possible* (Brighouse, 22/2/96).

The shrinking resource base impacted negatively on the capacity of the City to carry out its role. One school which opted out of Birmingham's schooling system soon after the introduction of the 1988 ERA legislation was critical of local government's previous involvement in the resourcing of schools. The school complained that local government departments had been less efficient and effective than the school itself in managing financial resources and responding to the learners' curricula needs and the school's building maintenance:

> *We were very short of equipment, tools, materials, books, classes of children were sharing textbooks and couldn't take them home to do homework, we wanted machines, new technology, furniture was in a bad state and so on. We felt particularly concerned for our most able and our least able children ... the one thing that they needed, in addition to materials, was teacher time. We just couldn't give it to them because it has its costs which climb higher every year* (Knight, 28/2/96).

Furthermore, it was felt that in the past the LEA had distributed funds unfairly among schools. It was alleged that the LEA was doing this in order to encourage the admission of learners across municipal boundaries to better resourced schools as well as for political purposes to sustain the Council's position and influence:

> *Out on the periphery, there you have your more politically undetermined areas, therefore [LEA] money would be spent on the middle and outer areas in the hope of persuading marginal wards ... the consequences of political decision-making regarding children [was] being driven, not fundamentally by children's needs, but by the need for votes* (Knight, 28/2/96).

The economic principle that money is best distributed at the point of delivery of the service where needs and the priority of needs are best assessed, was used to justify the elimination of local government's involvement in school provision. However, the principle of equitable provision of resources to schools (as mentioned above) is an important counter-balance, particularly in situations where schooling has been characterised by racially-based differentiation.

The LEA's shrinking resource base had some mixed outcomes. The bureacracy of the Education Department had been restructured, trimmed of excess personnel in order to operate more efficiently than in the past (Brighouse, 22/2/96) and many City services, such as the School Library Services, now operated on a cost-effective competitive contract basis with schools. By delegating responsibility for these services (and their staff) to generate their own incomes if they wanted to continue to exist and for staff to retain their jobs, there was considerable pressure for the City's Departments to enhance the quality of service and compete in the market place for contracts even with those schools that were grant-maintained and had opted out of the LEA (Heap, 27/2/96).

During this investigation it was apparent that there was a fudging of governance and administrative functions at local level, with the potential of confusion about roles and responsibilities. For example, there was overwhelming evidence that the CEO (as part of the administrative bureacracy) had greater influence than the Chairperson of the Education Committee (the policy and decision making structure) in formulating and articulating the City's vision for education and its role in relation to schools. Although there was no tension or rivalry between these two leaders, or resentment among stakeholders, the fudging hampered a clear distinction between the offices and responsibilities of the Chairperson of the Education Committee and the CEO of the

Education Department; who was the real policy maker and how each participated in enacting the roles identified above.

The fudging of governance and executive or administrative functions raises problems with monitoring. Unless structures have publicly discrete responsibilities and functions the untenable practice of self-monitoring will occur. This is unacceptable when the allocation and use of public resources are involved.

The City's vision and consensus around the role of the Education Committee was too closely tied to the vision of an individual, i.e. the CEO and the enthusiasm for qualitative improvements in the City's schools and the momentum of constructive change could very well flounder were he to leave the Education Department.

> *Because Tim Brighouse is who he is, there's Tim's vision and I don't know if we were to talk carefully with Councillors whether we'd have all this. They can hear it. They understand it. So they agree with it. But I'm not sure that it's in them. If Tim goes, when he goes, I'm not sure how much of that will be residing in Birmingham* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

This concern had already been expressed by the Birmingham Education Commission in its 1995 recommendation to institutionalise the vision through structures that:

> *should be in place to support this on a permanent basis so that the vision can be implemented and the dynamism can be preserved from one Chief Officer to the next* (1995a:9).

Professional bodies had the potential to support or undermine school developments planned at local level. In Birmingham the LEA perceived these groups to be conservative and cautious in their receptivity to new ideas and morale was low among individual teachers who were members of these organisations. This was a problem if the LEA were to perform its roles effectively (Howell, 26/2/96). Thus there was a need to consider strategies to establish trust and confidence among these groups. Birmingham's LEA had worked towards this by making the school improvement debate a professional rather than a management debate and by inviting teaching professionals to engage in the debate and develop a common educational vision with the City Council. It was not possible to ascertain the success of this shift from the data gathered during this investigation.

Even though the City continued to assign authorship of the school improvement debate to the CEO, Birmingham's LEA tried to limit a Brighouse 'personality cult' by ensuring consensus among the City Council, various community stakeholders and educationists, so that they voluntarily adopted the vision and debate as their own. It was evident that no interest groups or individuals had distanced themselves from it. Instead it appeared that everyone endorsed and fully supported the role of the City, to the extent that there was a real shared sense of ownership, commitment to and responsibility for carrying out the vision.

The composition of the Education Committee as a governance structure was limited by not representing a broad base of stakeholder interests. As it stood, it only comprised politicians (City Councillors) and two co-opted representatives of Christian religious bodies and therefore had the potential to reflect an unbalanced vision of education:

> *Many of our City Councillors and their families attended [grammar] schools. It's right that we should be proud of them educationally. But ... because so many of our Councillors have links to those schools, we are producing a false satisfaction in the City with the state of education here ... If more Councillors had a closer view of what it was like in the normal schools in the City, then I think there'd be a better awareness and a better service to schools from the Council ... The elitist element can be a danger and a disruptor of order in education* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

However, increasing the governance structure to include a broader base of stakeholder interests was not seen by the politician interviewed to be feasible because of the already unwieldy size of the structure. In fact, the Committee's size had led the Chairperson to work informally with the CEO as a form of executive management system, supplemented every two weeks by a caucus meeting of the Labour Party members (Howell, 26/2/96). It was agreed that the lack of inclusivity, or the 'democratic deficit' (Howell, 26/2/96) on this governance structure was being compensated through the City's non-statutory forums.

It was planned to measure the effectiveness of the City's performance of these roles by the rate of improvement in learning results as compared to the rate of improvement in other cities' schools. Such 'hard edge' statistics were preferred by the CEO over other evaluation methods because they provided an objective measure (Brighouse, 22/2/96). However, at the time of this investigation it was regarded as being too early for trends in learning results to emerge. The only positive assessment of improvement in the City's educational system was that made by the Birmingham Education Commission in their 1995 report.

Local level of government, in contrast to central government, offered Birmingham's schools greater access to decision-makers, both political and executive. This was perceived to be a great advantage in problem-solving and responding appropriately to local needs:

> *We can get all that trivial stuff from central government. ... We can't get local justice from central government. We can't get local understanding of problems [from central government]. ... I haven't got a fence here ... I can't talk to the national government about that but I can talk to our Councillor ... It's important that LEAs are there to understand and administer local equity and justice. I can pick up this telephone and I'm speaking to people who know me, who know the school. I don't have to go back through history to explain something. They're responsive* (Worsley, 28/2/96).

8. Implications for South Africa

> *Theorising the conditions for an alternative public domain requires a philosophy of its values and purposes* (Ranson, 1995:443).

As an emerging democracy, South Africa has committed itself to the creation of an 'alternative public domain' which is not only an 'alternative', but which eradicates the system of apartheid education. The Constitution, post-1994 White Papers and legislation and the Reconstruction and Development Programme all clearly articulate this intention, as well as the values and principles which underpin and drive this commitment. The transition from the structures of the apartheid past to those which will embody democratic values and principles is now underway. Thus, involving local government in the provision of schooling is a serious consideration. At present both Britain and South Africa have three tiers of governance although these are located at different levels. In South Africa, local councils are not involved in school governance even though in all provinces there is the intention to establish administrative offices and, in some provinces, governance structures at sub-provincial level.

Comparison of the British and South African structures

	Statutory Governance Structure		*Executive Structure*	
	BRITAIN	**SOUTH AFRICA**	**BRITAIN**	**SOUTH AFRICA**
National	Parliament	Parliament	Dept for Education & Employment	Dept of Education
Provincial	-	Parliament[8]	-	Education Dept
Local	City Council	-	Education Dept	(Regional/Circuit Offices)
Institutional i.e. school	Governing Body	Governing Body	Management Team	Management Team

In reflecting on the existing British and South African governance and administrative structures, it is important to recall that the structural differences are formed by the different histories of the two countries. Transplanting in total, a governance model from another country, is not possible or necessarily desirable. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be learnt.

If South Africa were to assign a school governance function to local authorities, this would add a fourth tier and increase expenses. The fourth tier at an intermediate (local government) level would impact on the powers and functions already assigned to provincial and institutional level governance structures, as well as present provinces

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[8] Many provinces have also established statutory stakeholder councils. However, these only have advisory powers and are not policy decision-making structures.

with financial, accountability and liaison implications. Furthermore, it would appear that at present, Britain's City Councils exercise some of the functions and responsibilities exercised by South Africa's Provincial Parliaments. In the event of South Africa deciding to introduce this fourth tier it would not be surprising if provincial legislators were to resist any shedding of their powers to local councils. A similar response may be forthcoming from school governing bodies.

A governance structure requires a budget to cover secretariat, transport and other administrative expenses. Although it can be argued that this could be accommodated easily in local council budgets rather than from provincial Departments of Education, these councils are financially cash strapped and having to increase their services to township communities without a concomitant increase in the tax base.

Linkages between statutory structures from institutional through local to provincial levels would be necessary to ensure both lines of accountability and liaison. This raises the issue of whether a city council's Education Committee (comprising politicians) deepens the democratisation of the schooling system or if this would be better achieved through a statutory structure having broad stakeholder representation. As was evident from the comments of the City Councillor regarding the 'democratic deficit' in the Birmingham Education Committee, this model is inadequate to meet the aspirations of South Africa.

Since 1992, South African education policy developers have recommended the formation of statutory stakeholder structures with advisory and consultative governance functions (NEPI, 1992). Although these now occur at provincial level, these structures are not given full policy decision-making powers. Nevertheless, they form part of a democratic governance system. Given these precedents, it is unlikely that there would be public support in South Africa for schooling to be governed at local level by Councillors only, elected through a party political process.

A local council governance structure for schooling would need, *inter alia*, to include councillors and representatives of those interest groups (such as civic associations) and education-related sectors (such as teachers' organisations) which have a structured presence at local government level and possibly also some form of representation on the provincial governance structure. In addition, there would need to be representation from school level governing bodies. Unless the composition of the local council governance structure for schooling is inclusive, the phenomenon of consultative forums to cater for the interests of excluded stakeholders is likely to emerge, as occurred in Birmingham.

An additional problem is the fact that Departments of Education have divided their provinces into smaller regions or circuits for administrative purposes. These areas do not necessarily coincide with local government boundaries. A governance structure drawn from and based on local council structures could create a disjuncture and breakdown between governance and administrative functions. An alternative to the British model of local council governance for schooling could be the regional school board model which exists in Canada and the United States.

The curriculum framework and integration of education and training plan being introduced in our schooling system is premised, firstly, on the notion that a person's learning should be on-going, lifelong and enable that person to be adaptable and secondly, on globalisation trends which compel nations to develop economies which respond educationally to the rapid obsolescence of skills and information. This raises the question of whether local councils are the appropriate structures to facilitate and promote a shared vision of life-long learning among schools.

Birmingham's City Council proved to be an appropriate structure to respond to this issue because Councillors were well informed about economic trends within their City and the employment needs of the community and business sector. Thus the Council has supported the initiative to establish a 'University of the First Age' for school learners (*Education Bulletin*, 1995:4-5). This response was not only based on educational theories, but was driven by grassroots community needs for employment in a growing economy during the next millenium. Similarly, South Africa's local councils must ensure that local businesses thrive and provide employment to local communities. These long term economic interests provide local councils with a sound reason to participate in school improvement projects. Furthermore, local councils have resources and educational services, such as museums, art galleries and libraries, which can be used to support the objectives of lifelong learning.

In Birmingham, the impetus for the school improvement programme through target setting and guarantees, as well as the qualitative improvements in service delivery, originated at local government level through the initiative of the Education Department's CEO, endorsed and enabled by the City's Education Committee. The possibility of similar initiatives taking effect in South Africa's provinces through regional administrative offices would largely depend on the availability of disposable resources within regions, the degree of autonomy accorded educational regions and the possibility of developing consensus and cooperation around such campaigns. It seems more likely that local council structures, through business sponsorship, would be in a better position to initiate school improvement programmes and focus on specific institutions and their peculiar needs. Provincial governance structures are not an ideal structure for such programmes because they are concerned with macro-level decision-making and would not accomplish the requisite localised focus.

While it is likely that intermediary governance structures will be established some time in the future, it is not yet clear within the South African context, whether it would be preferable to have this divorced from local government and situated at education departments' district/regional level. An alternative would be to site this structure within or adjacent to local government councils, provided that the membership is expanded to include stakeholders. Even if the former option (a district/regional level govenance structure) is pursued, there can still be a role for local government to be involved in schooling.

Local councils, especially in urban areas, provide a number of services to residents and businesses within their boundaries. These include, *inter alia*, public transport, cleansing and sanitation, parks and recreation, libraries, museums and art galleries, council housing and building maintenance, clinics and publicity. Many of these services are needed by schools. In the past, a few of these services were supposed to have been

provided by the education authorities or, as in the case of Model C schools, governing bodies were responsible for them and could engage contractors to do the work.

It was evident in interviews and forum meetings in Birmingham that the provision of these services was frequently a point of discontent among school principals. Delays in delivering services, poor quality work and communication or liaison problems were frequently cited as the causes. However, despite these complaints, principals preferred local government over central government because of the easier access they have to local officials and the greater understanding which these employees had of schools' circumstances within their area. This led to more efficient service provision and greater responsiveness when problems arose.

It would also be efficient for South Africa's provincial education departments to delegate infrastructural service provision to a sub-provincial level. Given that most local councils already provide similar services within their boundaries, provinces would better utilise regional resources if duplication was avoided by extending these services to schools. This would require contractual agreements between local council service departments and the provincial education departments. This would be a saving to the education departments which would be able to achieve reductions in retaining personnel and workshops and in capital costs for equipment because departments would only pay for services rendered.

Decision-making relating to access to learning includes issues such as admissions and language of instruction policies, siting and capacity of schools and transport. Although educational policies will be made at national and provincial levels so that norms and standards are regulated, the implementation of such policies requires an appreciation of local conditions and communities. However, for the efficient deployment of human, financial and physical resources it is important that such implementation is *not* delegated to school governing bodies because they are more inclined to address the needs of only the small group of learners attending their school. A local or regional level governance structure would be better positioned and informed to make policy implementation decisions that will consider the needs of the area and benefit the entire community.

Evidence from Birmingham confirms that the development of a vision for a region and setting the climate to enact that vision is best facilitated by officials at local government level. In addition, the case study indicated that regional planning, for example the affirmative action of disadvantaged and marginalised groups in terms of language, access to educational opportunities, the curriculum and special education needs, is more realisable through a sub-provincial governance structure which understands and knows local needs than a remote provincial level structure or a school governing body which tends to have a narrow neighbourhood focus.

Likewise, a governance structure at local level, if it has the resources, is well placed to enhance the speedy implementation of redressive measures in the move towards greater equity and in de-racialising and democratising schools.

One of the questions that requires further investigation concerns the administrative and financial links that would enable local government services to be extended to schools.

In Britain the LMS scheme provides school governing bodies with control over their school budget and the power to contract any service supplier. Through this scheme schools are able to contract local government departments such as the city's transport, architecture and building maintenance or cleansing departments for their services. These departments compete with commercial suppliers, which raises the quality of their service standards. It is also possible for schools to bargain jointly for better rates and to influence the style of service provision. This is particularly important in relation to the educational service provided by public libraries and museums, and principles concerning affirmative action and labour intensive job creation.

CONCLUSION

> *If [case] studies are not explicitly developed into more general frameworks, then they will be doomed to remain isolated one-off affairs with no sense of cumulative knowledge or developing theoretical insight* (Atkinson and Delamont, in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:327).

Despite the dissimilarities between the British and South African schooling systems, this investigation of the Birmingham City Council and its role in the provision of schooling has identified many of the salient advantages to be gained by involving local government in schooling and cautions against the perceived flaws in the British LEA system. Furthermore, the description of the LEA and how it works has as many lessons for South Africa's provincial education departments as for local government.

Local level structures, such as urban or rural councils, know and understand their communities and have a long term interest in the well-being and quality of life, including education, of their residents. This sensitivity to local needs enables the local governance structure to subscribe to a vision which has been developed together with local stakeholders. Local level decision-makers and administrators are able to respond more promptly to crises, or when the need arises, and more appropriately in relation to local conditions, than would remote provincial leaders.

The tax base of local councils, together with provincial grants, have, in most cases, enabled them to develop an infrastructure and portfolio of services which, with the agreement and support of the Education Department, could be extended to schools within their areas on a contractual basis. This delegation of services would enable provinces to trim their education department bureaucracies and retain only divisions and services such as personnel, curriculum advisors and examination divisions, which cannot be provided at lower levels.

Although the implications of local government involvement in schooling require further investigation and this should be done within the context of the new Constitution's provision for local governments, it is anticipated that this case study will prove to be useful to policy developers at national, provincial and local government levels.

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APPENDIX 1

List of people interviewed and/or consulted

A. Focused interviews

City Council Education Committee, Chairperson: Andy Howell

Department of Education, Chief Executive Officer: Tim Brighouse

City Council, School Library Services: Patsy Heap

City Secondary Level: Broadway
Head Teacher: Michael Worsley
Governor
28/2/96 10h00

Grant-maintained Secondary Level: Small Heath
Head Teacher: Cecil Knight
Former Chairperson of the Governing Body
27/2/96 11h30

City Primary Level: Prince Albert Junior & Infants
Head Teacher: Dave Brodie
Governor
26/2/96 10h00

B. Consultations

Bullock, Alison (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	08/02/96
Daniels, Harry (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	05/02/96
Davies, Lynn (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	14/03/96
Endor, John (Department of Education)	24/01/96
Gray, Dennis (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	19/01/96
Hull, John (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	05/02/96
Kirkpatrick, Gordon (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	18/01/96
Martin, Deirdre (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	16/03/96
Needham, Sue (School Library Services)	08/02/96
Rashid, Nagis (Department of Education)	24/01/96
Ranson, Stewart (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	09/02/96
Stewart, John (Institute for Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham	15/02/96
Tikly, Leon (School of Education, University of Birmingham)	15/03/96

APPENDIX 2

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MUNICIPAL YEAR 1995/96

CHAIRMAN: **COUNCILLOR ANDY HOWELL**
VICE CHAIRMAN: **COUNCILLOR SANDRA JENKINSON**

LABOUR MEMBERS

COUNCILLORS

LES BYRON
ANDREW COULSON
RICHARD EVANS
CHAMAN LAL
IAN McARDLE
DOUG McCARRICK
ABDUL MALIK
BRENDA NEWTON
ROY PINNEY
MUSHTAQ RABBANI
JOHN TYRRELL
DOROTHY WALLACE
DAVID WILLIAMS
HAIDER ZAMAN

CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS

GRAEME COOMBES
PAT FORESTER
GRAHAM GREEN
JANE HARRISON
MARGARET SCRIMSHAW
ANNE UNDERWOOD **Spokesperson**

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

NEIL BIDDLESTONE
JACKIE HAWTHORNE
MIKE WARD **Spokesperson**

***RECOMMENDED MEMBERS**
(VOTING)
FATHER MICHAEL KNIGHT
REVEREND RICHARD LINDLEY

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APPENDIX 3

Meetings/Events attended

Secondary Schools Head Teachers Forum	07/02/96
Primary Schools Head Teachers Forum	14/02/96
Opening of New World Imagery exhibition of Contemporary Jamaican Art	21/02/96
Birmingham City Council Education Committee	22/02/96
Nelson Mandela Primary School	01/03/96

APPENDIX 4

Map of Birmingham showing North, Central and South areas and their wards

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advisory Centre for Education
AMA	Association of Metropolitan Authorities
ANC	African National Congress
ASC	Agreed Syllabus Conference
BCC	Birmingham City Council
BCCED	Birmingham City Council Education Department
BEC	Birmingham Education Commission
BGF	Birmingham Governors Forum
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
DFE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DoE	Department of Education
ERA	Education Renewal Act
GM	Grant Maintained
GNU	Government of National Unity
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PHF	Primary Headteachers Forum
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
SLS	School Library Service
TLC	Transitional Local Council
TMA	Transitional Metropolitan Authority